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GOVERNOR MAPP TAKES ACTION ON FIFTEEN PIECES OF LEGISLATION

(August 19, 2015, St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands) Governor Kenneth E. Mapp has taken action on fifteen bills sent from the Legislature for approval.

The Governor approved Bill No. 31-003 expanding the definition “abandoned motor vehicle,” allowing the Department of Public Works to sell an abandoned vehicle. This will not only provide revenue, but also provide a tool to improve the health and wellness of the community.

The Governor approved Bill No. 31-0011 stating, “Stalking is a very serious issue, and I believe this bill provides an avenue of help that stalking victims do not have now.” Governor Mapp continued on, to identify areas of the bill that show opportunity for improvement, i.e., there is a requirement that a hearing be held on a petition for an order of protection. The bill does not require the court to continue a matter within a reasonable time, while the Governor suggested that this type of proceeding should require swift attention.

Governor Mapp approved Bill No. 31-0076 that directs the Virgin Islands Department of Tourism in collaboration with the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority to promote the island of St. Croix to visitors on St. Thomas and St. John. However, the Governor expressed concern over the expected date of August 31st to enable the bill’s intent.

Bill No. 31-0082 was approved by Governor Mapp allowing for the submission of financial information, through the use of profit and loss statements, for the books or records of managers or boards of apartments and condominiums, without the costly formality of an audit.

“I approve Bill No 31-009, I have stated my support for the agricultural industry here in the Territory and this bill will help enable this administration’s continued efforts. The bill requires the Department of Agriculture to conduct a feasibility study for the production, marketability and medical value of the Moringa Tree and the commercial value of the production of Bamboo and Aloe Vera throughout the Territory. I urge the legislature to fund this mandate,” stated the Governor.

Governor Mapp vetoed Bill No. 31-0110 stating, “I support the mission and work of My Brother’s Workshop, however the measure before me is not the appropriate or legal way to lease government property to anyone. I support what the bill is attempting to do, and I will direct the Commissioner of Property and Procurement to work with the principals of My Brother’s Workshop to construct

an adequate lease agreement.” The bill attempted to provide access and use of a piece of government property without the proper protection from liabilities to the government.

Bill No 31-0137 was vetoed citing the Bill provides that “all grants” would be a source of funding for the newly created Virgin Islands Ferry Boat Fund. Federal grants cannot be appropriated by the Legislature for deposit into named funds of the Government of the Virgin Islands.

Governor Mapp approved Bill No. 31-0140 thereby renaming the Virgin Islands Public Television System to the Virgin Islands Broadcasting System, as they have expanded their media capacity to include online streaming and FM radio broadcasting.

Bill No.31-0147 was approved by the Governor, increasing the amount of revenue anticipation notes from \$40,000,000 to \$60,000,000 and striking the maturity date. However Mapp cited an error in the draft, “I prefer that you drop the maturity provisions in the bill so that the government may be able to negotiate with the lender dates more beneficial to the Territory. Once this is done, the Territory should be able to take full advantage of this benefit.”

Also approved was Bill No. 31-0148 authorizing the government of the Virgin Islands through the Public Finance Authority to issue real property tax revenue anticipation notes in fiscal year 2015 and fiscal years thereafter. “I like the Senate’s action mandating that not less than \$15,000,000 in tax refunds be paid from the Revenue Anticipation loan. This action is akin to someone “closing the barn door after all the horses have run away.” Since taking office on January 5th, my administration has paid out more than \$31,000,000 in tax refunds. The Commissioner of Finance continues to pay tax refunds. Thank you for lending your support to our efforts, as issuing tax refunds to our citizens is a priority to our government,” stated Gov. Mapp.

Governor Mapp approved Sections 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, and 13 of Bill No 31-0149 relating to property tax assessment rolls authorizing the Tax Assessor to issue tax bills based on the assessment of the property of the current year and providing notice of new assessments. “Specifically I approved a measure that make appropriations for various projects in the Territory to include the Women’s Coalition of St. Croix which has consistently been funded substantially less than its counterpart in St. Thomas/St. John. Also contained in this bill is an appropriation to spend up to \$500,000 from any available funds for Drought Relief. I thank Senator Janette Millin-Young for offering this appropriation.”

“I commend Senator Clifford Graham for his important work on the necessary amendments to the STARS act. This promises to be a powerful tool in our continued efforts to grow and diversify the economy,” said Mapp.

Governor Mapp vetoed Section 4, citing that the Legislature is skirting its own law regarding how monies are to be accessed from the Communities Facilities Trust Fund, questioning “Additionally, why is the Legislature reducing funds for St. Croix’s allocation to maintain its three cemeteries?”

“I also vetoed Section 9. I do not believe that this veto requires much discussion from me. My position on the issue of salaries for members of my cabinet is a matter of public record,” concluded the Governor.

Section 11 was vetoed based on a citing of unnecessary duplication of reporting.

Governor Mapp approved Bill No. 31-0160 commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War, particularly to recognize the approximately 1,600 Virgin Islanders who served and 16 Virgin Islands’ servicemen who gave the ultimate sacrifice. “Each day Virgin Islanders continue to fight on behalf of a grateful nation, and they must be given the respect and honor that they deserve,” Mapp stated.

Bill No. 31-0175 was vetoed citing that the measure does not accurately reflect the request made by the applicant for B-3 rezoning or the recommendation made by the Department of Planning and Natural Resources.

Bill No 31-0019 was vetoed noting that the bill creates more confusion and problems and it does not provide the assistance to victims of harassment that it is intended to help. “To be clear, harassment, stalking and domestic violence are all extremely important issues. However, we must be sure that the laws that we enact provide the intended benefits to our citizens. The new law should be clear and dissuade unnecessary challenges,” cited the Governor.

Governor Mapp concluded his actions by acknowledging Resolution No. 1820 to petition the United States Congress to repeal the provisions in the Revised Organic Act relating to the official residence of the Governor of the Virgin Islands and to grant the authority to the Legislature of the Virgin Islands.

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